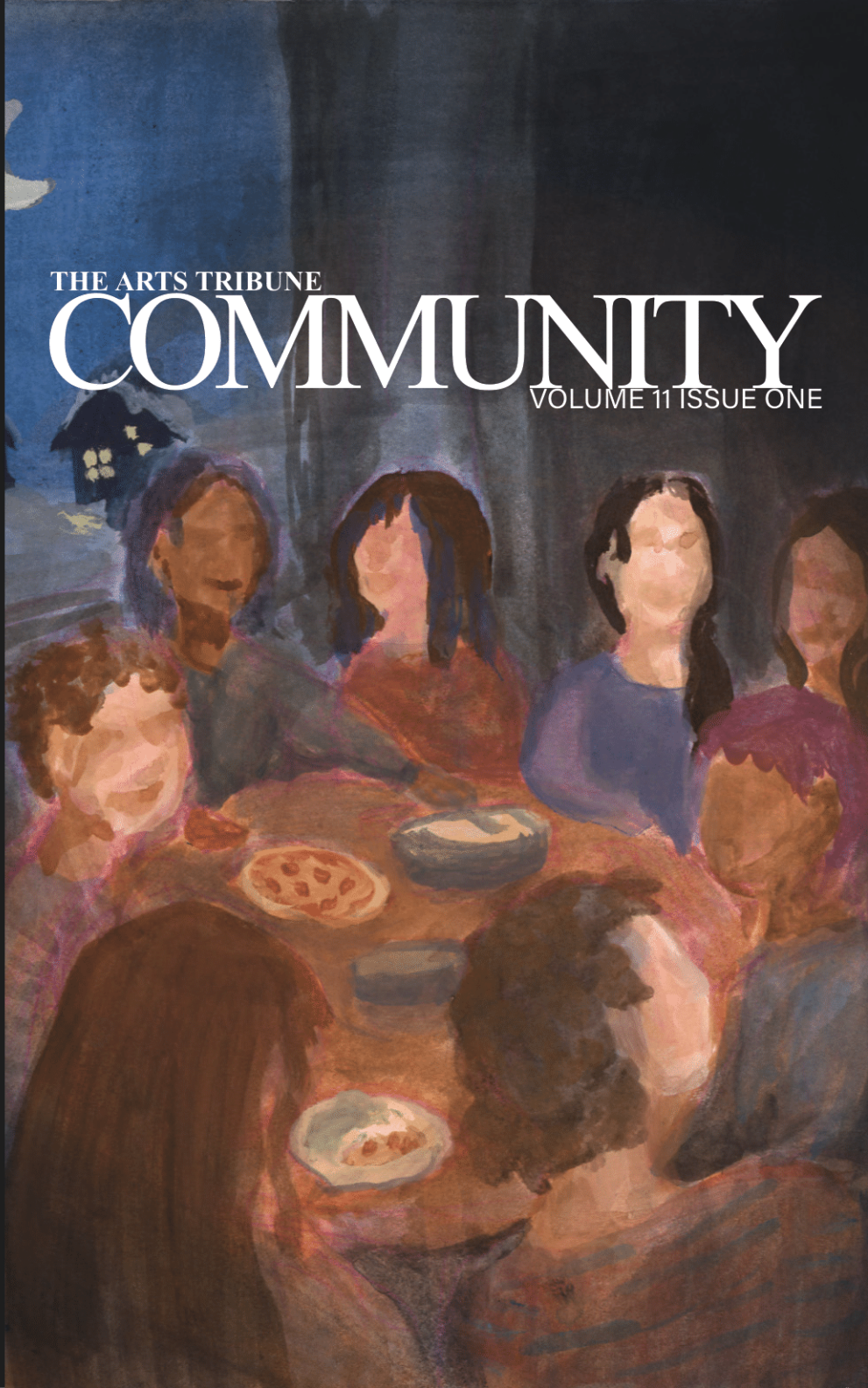

THE ARTS TRIBUNE

COMMUNITY

VOLUME 11 ISSUE ONE

THE ARTS TRIBUNE FALL 2022 VOLUME 11 ISSUE ONE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
ARTS STUDENT BODY COUNCIL '22-23
presents

"COMMUNITY"

volume 11, issue one

by
THE ARTS TRIBUNE

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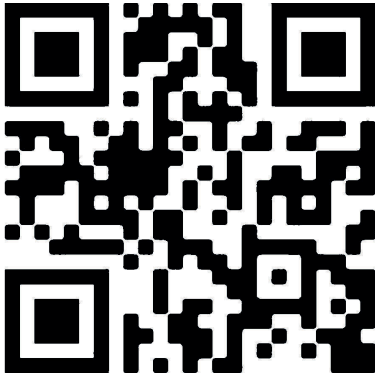
The University of Manitoba campuses are located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

We respect the treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

Content Warning //

This books' theme is Community, and some pieces may touch on potentially uncomfortable topics. If needed, please scan the QR code below to access mental health resources.



LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The isolation from those we love and the places we frequent have illuminated the importance of relationships in our lives. *Community* has been our way to reflect on relationships, as well as to give the student body at the University of Manitoba a chance to share what community means to them. Some find community in their family, others in their friends, faith, or romantic relationships. Whatever a person's relationship is to their community, for better or for worse they are in part shaped by this connection, and this issue seeks to explore that relation.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all of the students who submitted their works for this issue, whether their submission was accepted or not. It could not have been made without your creativity and openness to share.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the ones closest to us—our parents, siblings, friends, and teachers—thank you. We would not be here without your love and support.

To anyone reading this: consider expressing gratitude for the loved ones in your life.
It is this love that keeps the planet turning.

WINNIPEG
CN

MOHAMMED TOWHIDUL ISLAM

SERENA CHAN

Fixing our mistakes

Raul Toichoa-Fulford

The road surface should improve

And storms appear on the horizon

And the drivers slow down!

They do...

But not because speed fines are tripled where they're going

But because it's hard when you're going much over fifty

To wave at the men as they haul up that sign

To hear the wind buffeting that board

Or the one shouting, "Hold! Hold!"

Or the other one laughing

The ladders trembling

The hammer-drill:

"Welcome to Saskatchewan."

The Secret Society
of the
Girls' Bar Bathroom

Elke Hasselmann

The familiarity of the arms of a stranger in the bar bathroom, the lip gloss passed around, the communal yell of acceptance for a forgettable topic.
The sound of a friend's voice through the sound of water in the bathroom, the comfort and knowledge that they will sit on your toilet to keep you company.
A hair tie mark left on your wrist after sharing it with a fellow classmate, wondering how many have gone missing in your lifetime and how many you have collected yourself.
Watching a friend in your mirror placed on the floor to apply makeup as they try on the top you bought last week and will gladly share.
Walking in a room or party or bar and sharing a scent with a friend, borrowed at the last minute because it smelt so nice in their hair, on their skin.
Talks of bloating before going out, gripping non-existent fat on a 20-some-year-old body you will wish for.
The voice of a friend wishing you would stop seeing yourself in a way she cannot perceive.
Feeling the warmth on exposed skin, fingers braiding lake-washed hair in the summer heat, screams of laughter heard across the water.

Knowing how to hold keys at night, to avoid ponytails in the dark.
Sharing a feeling when we hear a story of unwanted fingers gripping flesh.

The desire we share to protect one another, that those who know the feeling in this secret, yet open, community do.
Being born with the knowledge of how to hold a baby,
how to nurture,
how to care,
how to love as a human for a human.

The sisterhood of wiping tears off a friend's face when she has drunk too much wine and seen the boy who broke her trust.
The sleepovers when it gets too late, and we share secrets we thought that would never be told, all in hushed whispers, in relieved laughter that it all is not so serious.
Feeling the pull of connection to those women,
If they be Ophelia or Circe, who all girls feel is, in a way, part of them, body and soul.

To be born with a burning pain built inside us.

So, the community of drunk girls who yell and scream in unison at the topic no one will recall in a moment's time, that it feels like safety, feels like love,
feels like we have known each other in our past lives.

That we, as the community of girls in the bright bathroom stalls, feel the knowing, the insight to each of the girls whose arms wrap around them, that they too have felt the burden, the love, the strength, the power, the depths of sadness, the trials of this community too, that we are all one,
we are all she.

Portraits of a City Waking Up

Molly Wilson

i.
somewhere, a man stands at a bus stop. he smokes a cigarette and looks up at the rain. *looks like it's letting up*, he thinks.
somewhere, a woman stands on a balcony. she smokes a cigarette and looks up at the rain. *fuck, it's really starting to come down*, she thinks.
the two of them will sit in the same café tomorrow, and a hundred times after that, and never meet. the same living city carries them home.

ii.
a man lives in that apartment building alone. he has recently separated from his wife. his parents divorced when he was a young boy—he never really forgave them.
he goes to the fridge. he sees the picture his daughter painted for him. he's proud of her. he hopes she'll forgive him.
his daughter can't forgive him. she doesn't need to—she loves him. she's proud of him.

iii.
this city's first snow of the year.
somewhere, a man walks down the street. he has recently immigrated from somewhere warm and dry. other residents scoff at the weather. he watches it in awe and smiles.
snow slowly sinks upon a breathing city.

messages of the metro (two trains)

Indiana M. A. Humniski

we were like two trains
passing in the night
yours, in darkness
mine, in moonlight

as our passengers glide
moving quick, never holy
carrying almighty, wicked
barely lucid, and the lonely

our ticket-holders dance
yet not with earthly moves
instead, they fight the friction
track ridges, only grooves

they hold onto each other
all fingertips and palms
burn a circle in the centre
erase my lover's quirks and qualms

we were not like ships
not as stoic or with grace
we were glittering, breakneck
fleeting, futuristic pace

when flying, you'll forget
your impact on my slate
science calls for probability
whilst poets push for fate

infernelle

Eden Quiring

there is simplicity in fire:
its heat, its hunger, its violent free will—
a fire always burns the same no matter why it was started.
this simplicity is an act of defiance against the complexity of arson:
the shaking of the hand that pulls the match
and the certainty of the one that strikes it
against cold rock.

i believe it is a noble pursuit to wish to set the world on fire.
i believe the legend of the phoenix is not a myth.
i look into the eyes of women i know and women i don't
and i see flames, barely contained,
effortlessly sustained
by paper scraps and oversized logs of wood,
and i long to see red flicker against the black of night sky.
any woman who says she isn't burning up from the inside out,
smouldering and darkening at the edges,
is lying to herself to try to dim something inextinguishable.
hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,
and there is no woman between heaven and hell who has not been scorned.
this fury inspires in me both fire and peace
(i am sorry you must be angry.

i am happy we get to be angry
together.)
i love you with kerosene in your hands, dripping onto the floor without a care.
i love you when you are the fire and you are the forest and you are the witness watching it,
uncertain if you are feeling horror or empowerment.
i love you and this hot bed of coals called your back.

in the quiet of the night my own little fire is kept company by longer-burning and wider-spread ones:
Virginia and her letters
and the hearth of her love for Vita,
which all women know like
Icarus knows the warmth of the sun;
Sylvia and her poetry
and the gas oven of her despair,
which all women know like
Ophelia knows the names of the rocks at the bottom of the river.
Alanis and her music
and the burden of her burning cross,
which all women know like
Atlas knows the weight of a thousand cumulonimbus clouds;
these fires are different and yet they all burn the same.
simple.
fire does not feel emotion; it only gulps air and

burns whatever fuel it is fed:
love burns red hot;
hate burns red hot;
anguish burns red hot;
strength burns red hot;
all are beautiful and destructive unbridled,
although destruction is not always wicked
for sometimes we bend until we snap to make room for something a little
greener.
fire does not have intention.
you may warm your frigid hands over the heat of anger
and you may die violently by the hand of a woman's burning love.
the power of destruction and creation are omnipresent
and the decision between the two is made by your ability to hold a candle to the
candles before
and use your light to watch the way their flames were carefully directed towards
unknowingly self-imposed kindle.
i love all fires for together they are like the sun:
some days unbearable,
most days glorious,
and ultimately destined to destroy everything that revolves around its containment and
complacency.

Union

Molly Wilson

i love.
all i know is to love.
i think it is all anyone knows,
though often we forget,
distracted by the world.
life will always remind us
of our nature. on cold days.
the body lowered into dirt.
all we are left with is love
for the distant soul beyond us.
we hold it in our hands.
we give it away.
the sky weeps.
the night lasts forever,
or so we fool ourselves.

always, the day breaks.
the sobbing clouds part.
the crack in our heart opens.
the light shines through.
the love shines through.
we are left with our love.
please. give it away.

Adoration

Kyla Kent

you occupy my thought
like a cloud bathing in sunbeam
with such hallucinatory clarity
in brushstrokes of iridescent
greenery and lavender valleys
we swim through cosmic wave
in satisfaction and old memory
the thread of time spun of existential ethic
of warhol philosophy
of natural fiber and earthly fragrance
welding in electric bolt and spark
and the plague of soulful fantasy
flies through open horizon in my mind
in the beforetime
in the meantime
in the after all
the sudden pull to reality
the sartre-tirical nothingness
now filled with regurgitated saturations
of watercolor and angelic dance
to the low hum of the chord

the warm sleepy smell of skin
and moonlight haze
the poet's tears and eternal sunshine
the lust for life
for tender adoration
for adolescent reveries
for the playful bite on my finger
and amethyst wildflowers
which dance in pirouette.

I Have Ever Known

Jessie Taylor

the women I love are the strongest women
I have ever known. when I am too tired and broken
to carry myself, their words carry me
and their arms welcome me home.

the women I love are the most beautiful women
I have ever known. their shining eyes see
through me, their laughter calms my anxious heart.

if theirs is the only love I ever know
it will be enough.

We Have Known Each Other

Jessie Taylor

let us hold each other
under these neon bar lights and
in the silence of the parked car.
let me be your safety and
you'll be mine. when i reach my hand out
across the old park blanket and tell you
I love you, know that these words fail
to capture the strength.

you are in my bones like a sister, like
we have known each other for our entire lives,
and are only now remembering.

Epistle to My Parents

Molly Wilson

an eternal gratitude frames my being.
always, i feel blessed to be loved by you.
blessed to hold your hands as i grow
through every stage of this life of mine.
i have grown into a sentimental person.
i think of your love and i weep.

Mom,
i think of being a very small child and lying
on your stomach, watching movies, falling
asleep in a world that knows no harm.

Dad,
i think of being a child and always learning
so much from you. like there wasn't a thing
you didn't know or couldn't do.

sometimes i wish i could go back—
pretend to fall asleep after a car ride
and get carried inside to bed.

but, you both still carry me—
you do so much for me, always.
you will always carry me.
and i will carry you with me.
now, i get to carry you too.

DETONATOR

LJ Fulugan

i don't know where to start with this one.
if i try and think about it, my mind wanders in the field across from your house,
in the dimly-lit staircase up to the second floor,
or in the clouds that follow me home.
you have provided me with more beautiful moments in one day than i usually get in six months.

orange light peeks out from under a bandana i have thrown over my bedroom lamp. it is just enough to reveal the wisps of smoke that rise from underneath my comforter to the low, panelled ceiling above. it is an evening on a weeknight. i wait by my phone. i am preoccupied with the idea of appropriateness. when is the right time to call? when is it proper for me to drive through this dreary city, to change lanes against the flow of seniors in cars? this preoccupation follows me from my house to yours.

we do not talk when you open the door, nor when you lead me into your home. the click of a lighter, an uncomfortable wooden floor; these are the things i remember about you. it's dark out, now, and from the bedroom window high on the fourth floor you can look across the whole city—

a convenience store. a four-way stop. this is the whole city, to you.

but across from the convenience store is another

apartment building, whose fluorescent lights shine warmer than the oppressive, cool white of the one we stand in. sometimes, i wonder what would happen if i crossed the road to see what was in the other side. i never had the guts.

when i return, you are asleep. snores escape your small, cramped body like anguish in laboured breaths. i will lay beside you on my back with no blanket and let smoke fill my lungs until morning comes.

but downtown has a way of keeping you up at night.

i do not know you well, and it would be a lie to say otherwise. yet, i still hope (for some reason) that day will come.

our hands are close. i fidget. my legs cross and uncross, hands consciously being wiped against them to rid them of sweat. the beatles are playing in my mind, roaring to electric life through the sleepy room.

i want to hold your hand.

i'll fall asleep before i have the guts.

a yawn. the stretch.
steam will make its tired way through the pipes this morning, just like every other shower before. isn't it strange how things continue in their usual ways, i want to ask, even as worlds end? for these things, objects, they could not nor would not want to feel a difference. they will go when they go; some may remain as elegies. most will become dirt. i hope the toaster that toasts perfectly remains. yes, this is only a personal apocalypse, after all. it will

continue on afterwards, just like it continued before. i know myself too well. i cannot say goodbye like this.

but i can see the fallout on the horizon already. the heat flash crawls over iron and glass, and turns asphalt to black goo. i did not notice the sound. it must have detonated weeks ago.

i didn't know if i could do it if i were not looking at your smile, because i'm a cowardly sort of person, and my words flee from movement.
we'll give them time. we'll sound the sirens so they can hurry to their bunkers and basements and refrigerators when the time comes. in some four hundred years, we can go to those precious vaults and see what remains.

as concrete evaporates, and nuclear fusion catches you in your under things and unaware, i am confident that there was no one choice that could have been made different, or "better."

the first time i think "you're beautiful," you are facing out the window and blowing smoke into the sunny sky.
i can see your nape and the curve of your bare shoulders clearly. who can say why i hesitated to tell you—
but when i did, when our bare skins moved themselves across each others' surface, i pulled my face away from yours to look closer.

fission will make us atoms.
all of mine will still be reaching for you.
they will still cherish and regret you.
and maybe, many millennia in the future, after the war,

as fundamental particles and cosmic radiation travel
further and further away from our pale, blue dot,

the ones that were once me will look up into space
and pretend that they're only looking up at the stars
tonight, instead of searching for what remains

of you.

the scope of all this rebuilding

Alex Rana

the house was empty when we arrived
car sputtering dead in the driveway
tattered stained gauze curtains fluttering
from the second story windows

despite the stillness of the heat
that buzzed in our ears and peeled our lips
we carried our meagre belongings
in a single suitcase up the gravel drive

the deep red door gave way
before either of us laid a hand on it
awaiting our arrival with a creak
so violent the foundation shuddered

we made quick work of unpacking
rearranging past lives
confined to the first story
while the stairs were caving in

clothes strewn over the chair backs
blanket folded on the couch
excavating the past
a million dust specks set free

gradually we worked forward
repairing one plank at a time
a cacophony of pounding hammers
matching that autumn in mahogany

we found ourselves ascending
to the bedroom on the second floor

overlooking the shedding trees below
burrowing in for the coming freeze

when the ice melted and dripped
turning to steam in the pounding sun
we unfroze alongside it
covered in undiscovered warmth

cracks appeared all the way down
to the stone at the very bottom
a sprout emerged from the rubble
as the grass was born anew

hope carried us even further up
crowning at the peak of the roof
underneath the eaves in darkness
hands sticky with attic cobwebs

one by one the rafters stood guard
while we lay over them
the sun was dissipating into ink
as the shingles cooled beneath our feet

pierced by the dead stars overhead
our faces blurred into each other
your diamond eyes met mine
as we shattered in the dark

A Lone Wolf.

Alison Holliday

We, humans, are social creatures.
The lone wolf that finds themselves in this city
would die.
The lights too bright
No stars to lead him home.
Without the body heat of others we end up cold.
Without other people how are we meant to survive a
Winnipeg winter?

How many million years ago did the first creature
curl up next to the second?
How many of our ancestors looked around at their
friends and felt at home?
How many times has a mother held her baby, and
anointed their forehead with an oxytocin kiss?

We are born reliant on others,
Whereas a colt can run hours after being brought
into this complicated world.
A baby cannot hold up its own head.
Born early to stop literally ripping the life giver
apart.
Mutual assured destruction; we begin life in debt.
We survive because of what we owe each other.

The lone wolf has forgotten.
Thinking the best way is to survive alone
He becomes heartless: deciding that human life is
secondary to these sky-high piles of money.
“What could ever be wrong with that?
It’ll trickle down eventually!”

Like piss through the floorboards
Of all the empty buildings downtown.

Alienation from others.
Alienation from nature.
Alienation from self.
And then death.

Metamorphosis

Molly Wilson

i am guilty of a great many things.
the first of which is cynicism.
a cruel, cowardly, morbid sin.
i have seen emptiness in the cosmos,
and bleakness in our soil.
i have been petulant and evasive.
self-indulgent, romanticising the
wrong things. building up walls.
i have made myself an island.
i have turned my back on
neighbour and enemy alike.

i awoke one day with a great want.
a lighthouse beacon carving fog.
i will not be this beast anymore.
in hopeful metamorphosis,
i look to the boundless sky
with new eyes. with wonder.
embodying childlike glee.
standing under clouds,
kissed with rain and sun.
it is all a miracle.
there is no room
for cynicism
or isolation.

there is no island.
we were born here
to share this world
together. you and i.
all of us.

people
(who need people)

Indiana M. A. Humniski

they're the ones sitting at the table
who will close a chain
who keep home-fires alight
who reignite lost flame

they're the ones with open, encircled arms
fleeting smiles and sculpted hands
they're the ones who traverse the wild
of these unknown, uncharted lands

the ones with sparks in their pupils
the ones who wait, never wander
the ones who inspire a new spirit of joy
the ones who erase past days of somber

the attendant by the bedside
coffee, constant stage of refill
the echoing of a gentle touch
redipping of a barren quill

the father on the frontlines
the baby on the back
the one to tie a shoelace
the one who knows to knock back

they're the ones sitting at the table
the ones who will close a chain
who keep home-fires alight
who reignite lost flame

Oxytocin

Alison Holliday

Do you know humans are hardwired
to feel the rush of emotion
- this overwhelming fondness –
watching you drool on my pillow
whilst you sleep?

The light never looking like this before,
having travelled eight
minutes from the sun
to lie across your sleeping cheeks.
Giving me soft sleepy dopamine
form the sight
I laugh at your jokes
and am given the endorphin reward
I feel your warmth when we say goodbye
-your face so smooth-
As you give me my oxytocin kiss.

Someone a long time ago asked me:
IS IT LOVE OR JUST CHEMICALS?
but maybe it is both?
We, these creatures of stardust and iron
Going to sleep with the sun,
Storing stress in our fingernails
Filled with pure chemical feeling.
Maybe we are just chemicals, maybe it is all just chemicals.
Elements strung together.
atoms to atoms.

I am glad mine found yours.

I Can’t Remember You

Justin Langan

I woke one night and realized,
I can't remember you.

I remember your eyes,
A prairie sky blue,
And your thighs,
Danced as you move,
But I can't remember you.

I remember your laugh
With a warm smile,
And your soft lips
Red as rose hips,
But I can't remember you.

There are only fragments,
Scattered pieces,
As if your voice is
Gone to another
And your face is
Losing colour.

I am forgetting you
Like I'm supposed to do,
Making room for someone new.

blakean convocation

Indiana M.A. Humniski

as you look across The Green
you may see a familiar face
children of chapters you've lived thus far
classically charismatic race

for years, you have competed
with others, with your own mind
until you're here, in the Opening Clear
asking The Sky, "what's left to find?"

striving for acceptance and anguish
wanting to suffer, for what it's all worth
until you've arrived at the pinnacle
surrounding by future, hope, and mirth

when you've hit the top of the line
where validation supersedes joy
when you realize years of your life
were just a drawn-out self-marketing ploy

you'll finally pen your page
you'll fitfully write your song
in the dusk, when real work is over
when the streetlights have turned on

you may break from the fray
perhaps, soon back in The Green
in blossoming clover, lay
dormant yet dancing, completely clean

you'll try your hand at hobbies
when that old cap leaves the crown
yet, once you make a molehill a mountain
it's harder to start looking down

Congregation

Molly Wilson

a small, old church clings
to a patch of resting places
beside a quiet country road.

inside, people cling together
like one pulsing mass—crying
out in grief and joy—reaching
ever upwards for embrace.

Her body rests before us,
the worldly dress of a saint
travelling somewhere far away.

the light weeps down through
bright stained glass upon us all.
our hearts have cracked open,
a hole wrenched in gasping souls.

we sing

we cry

we hold each other

I
A
Live
Skyspire
quire shrive
Heaven knive
My Whitsunfire
Into its raw Rift
Where a Divine
Eye used to sift
and sigh, chime
wrytongued my
violetfiery Kyrie
inside it, mortify
your Clay. I pray
O my Children, ye
whom my Ghostly Hands
upbuilt and whose fresh Fleshly-
Clothed Ones built me up of Cedar and
gilt me in your Guilt, sacred me the Tabernacle
of the Shrouded Lamb's whose Everbroken Body mine
housed and devoured, for us! Now 'tis the Owl's and Grackle
I house. 'Tis theirs the Praises raise these Pews, theirs our Shrine
devoted to the Weep of a liquid God seeping through my Steeple
I, Ciborium of Emptiness, am, Chalice of wet Hollow,
wrought of a Rotting Faith, am Rock of my lost People
Am an Altar of the Hallow given freely you to swallow
Mine is the Grinding Lathe of Time, mine a Quiet Ark
Mine a final and Sole Door into that Scintillating Dark!

Steeple

Marcus Schneider

Bread

Marcus Schneider

For we Seeds
being many are oned in the
one Bread and, kneaded into the one
Body and this, our Leaven, one High Dread:
Yeast of a Manna-fed Heavendread are become
one Being and, being One, be the beoneing We we
are and are a Lovefeast for the Feeding of the Unfed
and should you, lone Soul, partake of us, but break
us, tear our Crust, but bite your Heart into, chew
our white Guts, transubstantiate you, you too
would be unyoued anew, chewed into
this new Us; we Bread feed
Quick and Dead

Letter to a Friend

The Arts Tribune

you said that I was the first friend you've ever had.

fluorescent street light reflections
on rain-touched boulevards'

I nod half-heartedly, and a mouth opens to speak:
you don't need to be here anymore.

nights in the cemetery
the only place still breathing

I was happier before

in that hollowed-out town
the melody of laughter

I didn't know you, but I wanted to.

stained sunsets from the window

when I try to think of you, my memories won't say anything,
but I still remember watching that thunderstorm, up on that hill.

the melancholy of youth

tell me, does your heart stop at the party
when my name

drops?

to be near you I would give up my time, or rather

exchange it
will you let me?

we surf in abundance
over barren fields

to be near you, in time with you,

to audio waves
and vocal cord vibration.

I was happier before.

are you hurting? yeah, you must be.
or is it just me?

to brush fingers as I pass you a ceramic mug I have taken from my cupboard—

you had a lot of friends already.
I wondered if you could use one more.

Earl Grey with honey, just as you like—

is there something about me that makes you care?

you stood at the platform and the trains cross
looking down on our escape route

tongue-tied, screaming on the inside,

you said that I was the first friend you've ever had

under the starry haze of dusk
melting rain into the lake

and asked if, in this head, I ever think about going up to the top.

A sea of orange amplifying the strength of Indigenous people across turtle island.

JAIRAJ SINGH

Bonfire

Marcus Schneider

Ashmere looked the same as it always had yet felt—alien, somehow.

A perfect, albeit faded, photograph. Miles stretched his limbs from the vehicle after a two hour's drive and gingerly, notepad in hand, traipsed down Main Street. Everything stood exactly where it had twenty years ago, only a bit crookedlier.

Two short strips of whitewashed false-fronts, like rectangular teeth, snaggled along either side of the asphalt; the white-corniced "Grimsby's General Store", the inn (which had really only ever served as a tavern), with its wooden, mock crenellations, the community meetinghall, the firehall, the points of the churchspire and grain elevator (on which he could faintly make out the name "Ashmere") stabbing out, like canines, biting into eyeblue heavens, bleached, as if cataractous, in a thin veil of smoke.

A sun, glaring blinklessly out of the west down the yellow stripe in the middle of the road, picked and peeled the cracked paint off the sunburnt surfaces, twirling into curlicues, baring the dry rot beneath. Through the gaps between the facades, down gravel lanes, sparse chains of white strawberry-boxes trailed off into the distance with their variously antennaed and weathervaned gables.

The slight fragrance of tinder and spoiled gasoline.

All of it, deserted.

Further on his way down the seemingly lifeless street, he caught the thin tinkle of a bell from somewhere behind him. Abruptly he turned, saw the front door of the general store swinging inward and a balding, beflanneled fellow step out and turn to lock it behind him.

"Good afternoon!" Miles called in a cold-hoarsened voice. The man turned a pair of crossed eyes in his direction, expression hidden under a yellowed broom of moustache. "Excuse me, do you know where the celebration is supposed to be taking place this evening?"

"Oh! Heheh." he half-chuckled, half-coughed. "Yes, the party! I was just headed there now after I locked up. It's going on right about now in the usual spot." The man paused. "At the end of Church Drive? Just past the crooked oak?" He paused again, round eyes thinned into a squint. "Do I know you?"

"No," Miles said a little too quickly. "No, I doubt it. I'm a newspaper columnist, writing an article about the annual festivities that are supposed to be going on tonight."

"Ah!" said the man, eyes rewidening. "Well colour me surprised. Who'd ever have thought our wee, humble Ashmere would one day make the news in— in wherever you're from. Where you from, kid?"

"The city." Miles said tersely, gesturing up the road whence he'd come. There were not so many cities around that the man had to ask which one.

"I see, I see." the half-bald head nodded. "Oh, it's Newton Grimsby, by the way. Newt for short." He outheld a sausage-fingered hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Newton." Miles gave a wooden smile, tentatively interlocking his own

shortish fingers with them.

The man paused, expecting an introduction, then, miffedly, continued, "Well, come along now, don't want to be too tardy! We'll miss out on all the fun, heh—"

Nearing the end of Church Drive, past alpaca-splotched fields the colour of dried snot, a distant buzz, as if of garbled human activity, livened the stagnant air. The road's eponymous, slant-crossed Anglican steeple peeling above a pale stand of poplar. In the drought-browned field across from it, a big, white tent bulged with life, like a boil; some distance behind it looming a precariously tall woodheap.

"There's Doreen McWhorter, there's Percy Oakes, Donald and Florence Muelheimer (they're great sports. Come in every year from Millbrook), the big one over there is—"

Newton's pudgy finger darted around the insides of the big tent, viscous with grease and wasp-stripes, along the thickly peopled rows of paper-plated fold-out tables, ground yellowed with straw beneath them. The whole hamlet seemed to have been squeezed inside. Miles took out his pen, began scribbling down notes.

The first thing he noted was the greyness. Some greys were darker or paler than others, some of them white and some bald, but scarcely a dash of natural colour among those hundred-and-fifty-odd heads, bobbling like musty, basswood masks. The average age had to have been over fifty, with fewer than a dozen under thirty. He noticed only one who appeared to be around his age, her hair the colour of sawdust, thirsting to be ignited, snaking in ropey braids around a flat, whitebread face.

"And over there in the back is Skinny Nick with the Bum Leg." In the corner of the tent,

cigarette held to his chapped-looking lips, a doughy, lopsided, unageable figure. "That's what everyone calls him."

Though he couldn't see the man's legs, he could tell the right one was longer than his left. His eyes, bright as the end of his cigarette, flickered here and there, occasionally in Miles' direction. Miles avoided his gaze, continued scrawling his observations down with placid detachment.

"And this here's old Hiram Leadbeater, our vicar." Newt gave the back of an elongated, spatula-bearing, aproned character in plaid, hunched over an electric griddle at the edge of the tent, a hearty pat. "How're you doing, Reverend?"

"Right as rain, Newt, right as rain." Leadbeater replied, gaze still fixed on the sizzling flesh.

"Say Hiram, looky here, we've got us a journalist! Come all the way from the city—"

"Have we now?" exclaimed the vicar in a voice at once nasally and sonorous, standing erect to face his guest. Foggy spectacles clung to the tip of a slight nosehook, magnifying two grizzled irises, apparently perpetually focused on something invisible to ordinary eyes. The lowering sun reflected directly into Miles' eyes off the mirrored dome of his head, crowned in a thin, white halo of hair.

"Welcome to Ashmere then, journalist," Leadbeater held out his spidery, baptismal hand to Miles and Miles accepted it. "Always a treat to have a visitor out here in this quaint, little community we call home. What's brought someone of such pluck and youth out here to the middle of nowhere?"

"Says he's here to document our festivities." Newt answered for him.

"He is, is he?" the reverend smirked incredulously, harrowing grooves into his dome of a head. "Well, praise the Lord. Never thought I'd live to see the day anyone'd give half a damn about us. Must be a slow one for the news."

"We've certainly had more eventful ones. Now, would you mind if I asked you a couple questions?" Miles asked sheepishly.

"Well you're already asking, so I'd better be." chortled the vicar.

"So how long have you lived here in this community?" Miles asked.

"Time immemorial." he replied with a crooked grin. "No, I took this post back in— in sixty-one I suppose. Been living here ever since. Or dying here, if you look at it another way."

"Could you tell me a little about the history of this— event?"

"Oh, this little get-together? It's been going on here as long as there's been an Ashmere, probably longer. Hasn't changed one smidgeon in all that time, excluding the plastic utensils."

"And how long has Ashmere existed?"

"Not sure, but sometime around the turn of the century, I believe, is when our first homesteaders settled here." His spindly fingers pinched two slices of white bread. "Care for a sandwich?" he asked.

"Sure." Miles consented.

"I'll fix you one right up, then. Being honest, I'm not even sure what day we were founded. This little gathering's not really a celebration of anything in particular so far as I know, just an excuse to, you know, bring the place together. Gab a little, drink a little, enjoy some fine cuisine, dance and laugh around the bonfire. Keeps the soul of Ashmere alive, reminds us who we were

and are, where we belong. Something we haven't got much of anymore, in these last days."

"Hardly need a better reason than that, do you?" Newton added between swigs of beer.

Miles glanced over at the heap of broken images, onto which men were chucking broken palettes and carboard from the back of a pickup. "And what about the bonfire?" he asked. "Why do you have that?"

"Not sure." the reverend shrugged, flipping a crispy-fried calf brain onto one bread-slice and handing it to him on a paper platter. "Here you are, kid." Miles suddenly wasn't all that hungry anymore.

"Is there a vegetarian option, by chance?" he asked.

"Not to your taste, huh? Suit yourself, city kid," the reverend said, chomping carnivorously into his newly-assembled sandwich.

"So, about the bonfire?" Miles asked. "I mean, why a bonfire?"

"Miles always loved the bonfire." Newt remarked offhandedly, nose reddening with beer. Miles' heart leapt instinctively up into his throat; he swallowed it back down.

"Where'd we get it from, you mean? Lord knows. Maybe it came from the Scots, or perhaps the Irish. Or maybe it has something to do with Guy Fawkes Night or May Day or St. John's Eve. Maybe we picked it up from the Assiniboine Indians who lived here before our kind moved in."

"Truth is no one knows why we do it. But we do it anyhow, keep it burning, keep it alive, year after year. We don't need a why to know why." Seeing his question was going nowhere useful, Miles' eyes meandered off into the crowd, where they locked with those of the

sawdust-haired girl, wide like a starving dog's, and quickly darted away.

The reverend smiled wickedly. "Ah, there's Newt's girl. Quite the looker, isn't she?"

"What?? No, hey, I—" Miles sputtered, glancing over at a Newton, who chuckled.

"She sure is, my little girl! Say, kid, why don't you go dancing with her tonight? She'd sure love that."

"With your daughter? Oh, oh no that would be a terrible idea." Miles laughed slightly panickedly.

"Why not? What's the harm in a little fun?" Leadbeater elbowed him. "Go on, ask her. The fire's about to be lit."

The melting orange of the sun pooled at the horizon. The moribund people were trickling out of the tent into the open field behind the churchyard, brimming with more crosses than there were living Ashmerites. Which one was his father's was lost to time.

Skinny Nick with the Bum Leg hobbled over to the tower of wood, swinging a red canister. He circumambulated it widdershins, drizzling it with clear fluid, as if from a censer, and flicked his cigarette lighter thrice before it produced a fragile, bluish-yellow flame, touched it to the drenched wood.

And the yellow crept up the surface of the pyre until all of it was moving and alive with heat and song.

And the old folks circled the Phlegethon dragoning out into the fiddling stars, waltzing slowly, creakily along to the world. And, before Miles knew where or what exactly he was, Uncle Newton's girl had seized his hands, nearly flinging him into the fire. She swung him around, laughing,

to the shrill of the fiddle, braids glistening against flame.

And there was a joy stretched across her face, striped in the fireglow; joy he hadn't known since he was seven, when last he'd danced around this fire, holding his father's rough hand. Before the incident, before his mother took him to the city where there was a future.

"Come" he heard a quiet voice beckon.

"Come, Miles Grimsby Jr., and see."

And past his cousin's blaze-striped face, he saw the fire soar into a vast, incandescent being and sing with the chorus of her thousand ancestral tongues from one mouth.

"Oh, wayward boy, how long have we yearned to shelter you under our wings like a mother hen and you would not? Come beneath our ancient wings, within our protecting veil, where you've always belonged.

And yours will be our love and our pain
and our rage and death,
yours be our rekindling!"

And the great flame embraced him and his kindred souls in the warmth of her mothering arms and together they danced and wept and were home.

The Cloud

Jakiya Friesen

There once was a boy who loved a Cloud. This boy loved the Cloud as only little boys can; temperamentally, whole-heartedly, and lightly. The Cloud loved the boy as only a Cloud can; wisely, kindly, and desperately. And whenever the boy was tired, he ran to the Cloud and hugged him so hard. Then the Cloud picked him up and sat him in the sky. The boy built elegant sandcastles out of the Cloud, drank sweet rain from the Cloud, and played wild hide-and-seek with the sun and the Cloud. And whenever the boy went to the Cloud, the sadness dripped out of the boy, fell to the ground and the earth swallowed it up.

Cloud! Cloud! - Boy

Then the boy grew older. And whenever he was feeling sad, he ran to the Cloud and hugged him so hard. Then the Cloud picked him up and sat him in the sky. The boy built elegant sandcastles out of the Cloud, drank sweet rain from the Cloud, and played wild hide-and-seek with the sun and the Cloud. And because the boy went to the Cloud, the sadness dripped out of the boy, fell to the ground and the earth swallowed it up.

Boy! Boy! - Cloud

In his happiness, Cloud looked to the heartbeat of the boy; warm, alive, vibrant. Thud. Thud. Thud. Then he looked to the heartbeat of himself.

Why are you sad, Cloud? - Boy

When the boy came to the Cloud, he gazed at the Cloud with childish love in his eyes, shining

and wriggling and hardly sitting still. He loved the Cloud as much as he knew how to and had grand plans for their future. They would always be together, and the boy would never have to leave the sky again.

And of course, I will always love you, and we will grow old and grey together and I will never have to leave the sky ever again! - Boy

One day, after saying goodbye to the Cloud, the boy walked up the hill. The wind blew and whipped his hair around his face, slicing the grass in two. When he reached the top of the hill, he looked back and waved. Already looking forward to the next time he could come see Cloud, he ran to the house where he lived.

Goodbye, Boy. - Cloud

The next day, the boy came. He ran up the hill, hoping the Cloud wouldn't be sad today. He didn't like when the Cloud was sad, because then the boy was sad, and he thought the earth had enough sadness resting without adding both his and Cloud's. He struggled futilely against the wind, a sharp pain near his heart. His breath came in gasps and ragged bursts. It seemed that the wind wanted to push him away, but the boy wanted to be with the Cloud, so he had kept on running, struggling with all his might. Finally, he reached the top of the hill, and called to Cloud.

[silence] - Cloud

The boy thought, *Maybe Cloud didn't hear? The wind is blowing very hard today. I'll try calling Cloud again. This time I will call louder.* But again, there was no whisper. Suddenly, the wind gave a loud moan, then stopped. The air became still, and all that the boy could hear was his own heartbeat, real, warm and alive. *This time I'll call as loud as I possibly can. The wind has stopped, so Cloud must hear*

me! But the only whisper he heard was the wind, which had started again and was caressing his bewildered face. The boy stood on the hill, calling and waiting. Occasionally, the hill shuddered beneath his feet, trying to swallow up the boy's sadness, but the boy refused to let go. The only way he would let go of his sadness was with Cloud, once he came.

Where are you, Cloud? I need you. - Boy

When the sun sank down trying to hide, standing on the shuddering hill, with the wind caressing his face and the sun hiding, the boy tried calling one last time. He waited and waited, and when no answer came, the boy went home. This time, as the boy walked away, it seemed that some of the heartbreak, sorrow, and broken memories that the earth cradles had slipped into the boy, settling into his young and dark earthed heart.

Please, give me your sadness. It is too much for you. – Earth

That night there was a terrible storm. Lightning. Thunder. And hard, wet, cold, heart wrenching rain. All the grown-ups hurriedly took their children and retreated to their cozy fireplaces. When a tree fell onto the boy's house, the thunder stopped, the lightning stopped, and the rain, which had been hard, wet, cold and heart wrenching now became soft, wet, gentle, apologizing rain.

Come along, children. – Nervous Grownups

The next day the rain continued. Each raindrop fell from the sky and drenched the boy sitting outside. As he sat there, wet, with a hurt and bewildered expression on his face, people drove by and gave him the looks which only grown-ups can give, their eyes saying that they know what is best for you. Yet as the rain slipped noiselessly down from the sky and the boy's young, fresh, earth

darkened heart died, even the most condescending face expression turned into tears of memory and heartbreak.

Why did you leave me, Cloud? - Everyone

From that day on, the boy tried his hardest to forget the Cloud, and eventually, he did. He became a grownup with a grownup job and a grownup house who gave grownup looks to those little children sitting in the rain and never, ever, went anywhere without an umbrella. He met a grownup girl who loved deeply and one day, with the rain gently falling, the boy asked her to marry him. As soon as she said yes, he rushed her inside.

I wouldn't want you catching a cold before our wedding! - Boy

On a beautiful cloudless afternoon, the boy and girl married. The sun shone brightly, and the wind blew lazily, and they lived a happily ever after life. They went on hot air balloon rides and took turns counting the stars. They sat by their warm fireplaces and watched the flames when the rain poured outside their windows. And they loved each other more than they ever remembered loving before.

No one admits that we are afraid of the rain. - Girl

But the Cloud missed the boy. He missed the elegant sandcastles, the sweet rain falling into the boy's mouth and the wild hide-and-seek with the sun. And he saw that the boy was angry, but deep down, sad. And for so long, the Cloud was sad too. He watched the boy propose to the girl with tears streaming down the Cloud's face. He watched from out of sight as the boy and the girl got married. He sometimes shooed away the younger Clouds, so the couple could count the stars. He put on a cheerful face for when they blew

around in their hot air balloon. And he cried for a lost friendship when the two sat by the fire and laughed and laughed and laughed. And, with time and the clouds around him, the Cloud eventually healed.

Do you ever think of me Boy? - Cloud

Then the boy grew older. He grew until he was old and grey and had to use a cane to walk. It got harder and harder for the old man to take rides in the hot air balloon, and he spent more and more time watching the fire. One day, the boy looked at the girl, saw the love in her eyes, and remembered. He told the girl, and when he was done, the girl remembered. And they cried and dreamt of children and clouds.

I love you, dear heart. – Girl

The next morning the boy woke up, looked over at his wife, and kissed her forehead. His lips came back cold.

Why did you leave me? I can't do this alone. – Boy

That night, there was a terrible storm. It sounded like the sky was mourning, for it was. The boy lay in his bed all alone, wasting away, day after day, thinking about the girl. He thought about how he met her and the wonderful life they had shared. He thought about the hot air balloon rides, the nights spent counting the stars and the times they had laughed and laughed and laughed.

I still love you, dear heart. - Boy

The boy also thought about Cloud. The more he thought of him, the more he missed him. So, he made up his mind. Hidden deep down within the shadowed recesses of his shattered heart, he missed Cloud and wanted to see him one last time.

Give me your sadness, Boy. It has broken you. – Earth

One morning, the boy slowly sat up and looked at the empty space where his beloved girl used to lie and make him laugh. He smoothed out the permanent creases in the linen from her body and stood up. Walking around to her side of the bed – he still didn't sleep anywhere other than his side – he picked up her pillow and deeply inhaled, smelling her scent one last time. He gently fluffed up the pillow and placed it down in its place. He pulled up the blanket and smoothed it down and ran his hand over the cover to get rid of any leftover wrinkles. Then, he picked up his cane, walked to the doorway of the bedroom, and looked back.

I wish you could have met Cloud. - Boy

The boy walked out of the house which he had called home for his whole life, left the front door unlocked, and started his long walk. Step. Step. Lean. Step. Step. Lean. It took a long, long time, and he had to stop one or twice to rest, but he made it. He stood at the top of the hill and took in the sight around him. The sun shone brightly at his back, the wind stirred the grass at his feet, and the hill silently supported him, a solid ground for the boy to stand on. The boy cleared his throat, opened his mouth, and paused.

I don't know what to say. - Boy

He stood there waiting, his heart, the wind, the sun, the hill, and the grass all waiting with him. Then he saw the Cloud. The boy's heart burst, and the joy in the boy welled out of him in the form of tears. It started to gently rain, and the boy and the Cloud cried together. The sadness dripped out of the boy and the earth swallowed it up, and the boy smiled for the first time since his wife had died.

There they are, old and grey together. - Sun

The boy, who was now an old man, slowly walked to the Cloud and hugged him as hard as his frail, weak, tired arms could manage. And the Cloud picked up this tired, old man with a broken, shattered heart, and the boy, finally resting, closed his eyes.

Welcome home, dear heart. – Girl

SLEEPERS

LJ Fulugan

It's eating me, these days. From here, at the bottom of the bedroom, dust is painting me to match the hardwood floor. This is an old place after all. High contrast would strain its eyes. But I need to stay. The thing this place is trying to say is a whisper now, barely audible against the creaks and moans and occasional shrieks that echo within this hollow, hallowed ground. Eventually, it'll become quieter than the dying radio in the salon before drowning in its static.

This is a long, drawn out goodbye. These are the final moments of a haunted house before termites get the woodwork and spiders extend their homes beyond their corners. I'm nobody to this house, but I'm the sort of person who thinks that everyone should have their last words dictated. I stare out the window. Snow is starting to fall. Why? Because it's lonely to be alone at the end. And, I think, I'd want someone to do the same for me. Eventually, I'll get up. It's not enough to experience the whole of this house from just one of its tiny rooms. I need to see all of it, and when I see all of it, I can see it in its entirety. At once.

That's unrealistic, but that doesn't mean I can't try. When I eventually walk by the window and stare into the increasingly snowy yard outside, my breath won't leave an imprint on the glass. What do these things mean? I'll ask myself that when I leave this room. I said it already. There's more to this house than just one room.

[it is awake].

I go to the kitchen now. There's no point in looking at the pictures on the walls. Going downstairs has been unritualized, and to do so is only to fulfill the need to transport our bodies from here to there. I think I used to ask myself how long we would do this. The answer is about this long. A kettle begins to whistle once we pass the threshold of the white, wooden arch that marks the boundary between where we make our food and where we eat it. You woke up before me, after all, and something hot to drink in the morning is one of the few remaining desires we share in common. I stare idly as the kettle's sharp scream begins to dwindle. My eyes travel from the doorway we came from, to the microwave with a bowl of rotting fruit on top of it, and then to the fridge. The fridge used to have pictures and letters and cards. It's blank now. I think they came off the last time we—

The sharp sound of ceramic meeting counter intrudes this thought process. Three sugars. Three creams. Too sweet. It's always been that way, and since it's the effort that counts, I haven't minded enough to say anything yet. How many nights and mornings, nights and mornings have we done? How many more are there? We never got married, but it would feel wrong to leave now. Sometimes, when I'm with you and neither of us are saying anything, I think to myself that this must be a dream.

[it is asleep].

Please wake up.

When I cried and you did not hear, I resumed the brutal role of being okay while I checked your IV and left another note for the nurse. Your flower is wilting. I don't know whether to replace it anymore.

After the blank drive home, I am still too

withdrawn inside myself to brace for what comes after the door. It is heinous, it is ugly— the place that is supposed to be home and has been refurbished. Not an entity in and of itself, nor any sort of ontological change. It's nothing, and I hate this nothing.

This nothing is a something, though. It is the absence of you, given form. It is the way there is no greeting, or its returned pleasantry. No lights on anywhere else in the once shared space. Because, for now (at least I hope it's for now), it is not shared. It's just mine. And though it is currently like this, I have to keep living.

Living feels like the hard parts of getting better, as well as its counterparts. As the bed's soft touch is beginning to draw me in, I panic with eyes shut when nothing makes its final presence known.

The pillow only smells like me now.

The most vicious part of me keeps saying it to me, and I need you to tell the truth. It says to me, when I sleep and when I'm alone, muttering with putrid breath, that "the problem here is that you must love her more than she loves you, and that is why things are the way things are."

But those thoughts are wrong, because when I do not feel like that, I am lonely only for you. I walk by lovers and think of when we were together. I see them hold hands, and a part of you whispers to me: a phantom voice that has been silenced. I know I can come back to you, though. And I don't want to leave anymore, because I'm tired of being a coward, and when I think like that I wish I could be anything else. To be honest, I've managed to stop dreaming of you at night. I'm not sure whether that's a good or bad thing, but the point I'm trying to get at is that lately I've been dreaming lucid.

I realized this might be a problem when it happened while I was sleeping beside you. It was after you were moved into the hospital. I remember deciding to pretend that you were only sleeping. Here, in this act of roleplay, I could soothe myself without thinking of the state you were really in right now. Your cold body and the thin sheets that covered it would not move as I placed my weight beside it. You do not put your arms around me, and I curl with my back facing your upturned body. This is actually a somewhat familiar scene, but the loneliness it implies means that there must be a better thing. Now, finally, long after the sun had set and the doctors had gone for their late and cheap residency dinners, it felt private enough to allow my tiredness to take me.

When I slept, I did not dream the way I usually did, but I did not rest easily. I came to life again, alone, in that empty bed. Not as the fleshy vehicle I have to use to be alive, but as the me that thinks and perceives and dreams. I went to the other house (not 'our house'— not right now). The lights are off. It's barely autumn now, but snow is starting to fall. This house is haunted. It's the home of all the people who have lived in it before. These walls have been covered in the grime of the words that echoed off of them. I can see them now. Mine, and yours. And the ones who came before them. It looks like two-dimensional smoke has been placed above the wallpaper. It screams and sobs, thrashes when I try to hold it because the feeling of being gripped is felt more on the soul than on the body.

So I won't hold it. Though this place doesn't just belong to me, I am one of the few who can say that it was theirs. In this dreaming place, I can really take this whole, haunted thing in. But I can only do it for so long before I get tired. Dreaming

drains so much energy. I climb the stairs. I stop at the doorway to the bedroom, but turn away. I can't sleep there for now. I go somewhere we didn't share. I lie on the hardwood floor. Dust is starting to fall, and it looks like snow from the bottom of the room.

I wrap my arms around myself. I hope that when I dream tonight, it's of some time when we were together and both of us were awake.

[it is].

This Page

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